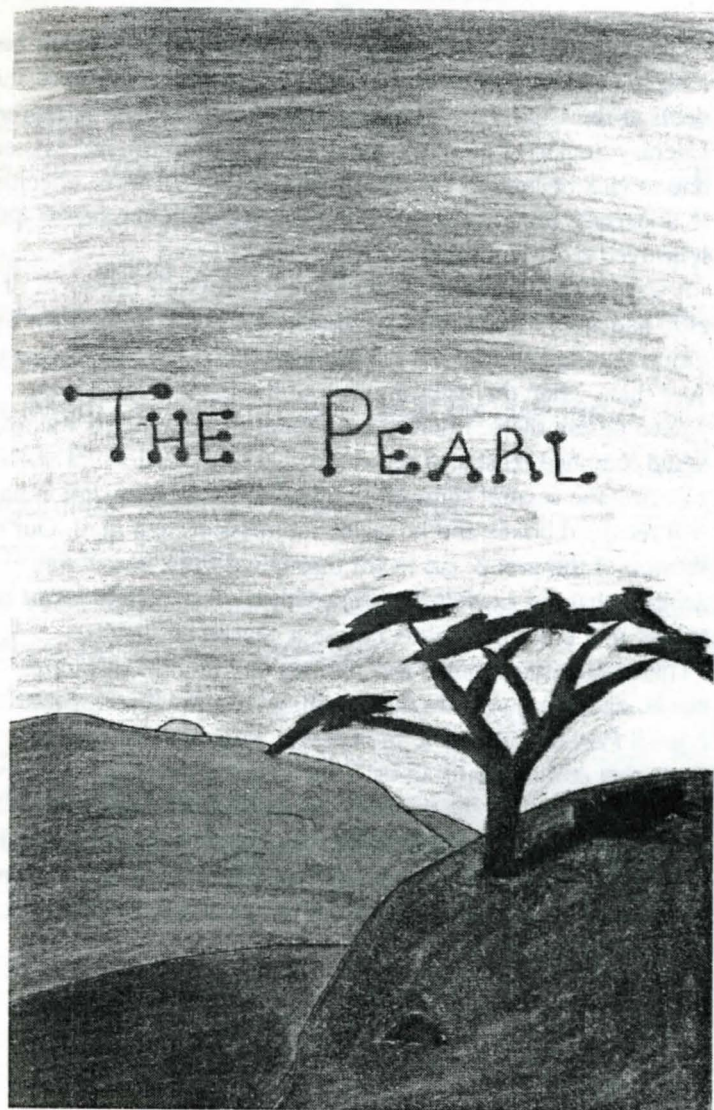


The Lowell Pearl



2000 Edition

Dear readers:

The issue of the *Pearl* that you are reading right now has been long in coming. The publisher of this journal is a group of students at the University of Massachusetts Lowell known as the Literary Society. For years, the Society had simply not existed due to lack of interest or. As a freshman student here, I decided to undertake the effort of reviving the organization, which quickly proved a difficult task.

It was like reinventing the wheel, as a previous president of the club had said. I had to renew interest and spark excitement for a group that had simply not existed as far as many people knew. And then, when the daunting task of the Lowell Pearl was placed before them, I had to keep them from being scared away. And they had reason to be scared.

During the several semester long hiatus, the organization had still received boxes and boxes of submissions and mail. Our new version of the group had to sift through all this, and it was decided that the Lowell Pearl needed one last hurrah, a sort of tribute to a great magazine, before it ceased publication.

Therefore, after months and months and months of blood, sweat, and tears, you are now reading the final issue of the *Lowell Pearl*. Consider it an homage, and a way of thanking those that still had faith in us. This includes the many contributors over the years, the members of the English department faculty, and the hard-working members of the Literary Society, both previous and present. I thank them all, and I thank the readers who are about to enjoy some great works of poetry and prose in the pages that follow.

Enjoy!

Rob Vellella
Co-President
UMass Lowell Literary Society

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The Lowell Pearl 2000
Produced by the Literary Society at UMass Lowell

Millennium Fever

The weather was a frigid 41 degrees in early July when the eminent musicologist, Julian Devane urinated in the quad outside of Royce Hall on the UCLA campus in view of 150 amazed students and professors. In defense of Dr. Devane it was said that he did what he did on the grass, not on the cement. Others noted, however, that there were several bathrooms within fifty yards. Even assuming a great urgency, plenty of high foliage twenty feet away would have provided privacy.

Professor Devane, however, saw it another way. "Man has been micturating in the open for a million years. Secrecy has been a recent thing. Urine is sterile, my friends. We have nothing to fear." Even though weird behavior and unpredictable events had been on the increase the past four years and everyone had already heard the conjecture, the Devane incident had the last holdouts finally nodding their heads and agreeing that, yes, it probably was true.

Carl was among the first to accept the particle theory as the simplest and most logical answer. It was the only way he could make sense of his own odd behavior – he referred to it calmly as "difficult to explain." Son and grandson of rabbis, he had been taught all his life that control of personal desire and ethical-moral behavior were the cornerstones of a proper life. And he believed in the correctness of those teachings. How then to understand his recent lapses into the arms of prostitutes on two separate occasions. It was as if he had lost memory of himself, or his beliefs. As had happened with others who had engaged in deviant actions, his reaction was more mystification than horror. This simply does not make sense, he said to himself. Fortunately, he (and the prostitutes) were the only ones to know.

He soon discovered that scientists, once skeptical that the particles would have any effect, now believed that they had altered the magnetic field, in some cases, changing the body's chemistry, rearranging molecules. That makes sense to me, Carl thought.

suburban housewife, a so-called "swim-pool mom," drowned five boys in the backyard pool – two neighbor children and three of her own. Everyone knew that mothers committed unspeakable atrocities against their children – that was understandable in a weird sort of way. Especially if she was unhappy, if her husband was having an affair and about to leave her, if *she* were having an affair but her lover had abandoned her, if she was depressed, ill with cervical cancer, etc., etc. But this one made no obvious sense, the woman herself seemed puzzled. Not hysterical, not overcome with grief or remorse, but confused, as if, my God, why in the world would I do such a thing. Totally rational, but amazed.

Such phenomena became increasingly more common. All over the planet extraordinary events had been occurring with alarming frequency. The laws of probability and predictability seemed abrogated, and the particle theory seemed as good an answer as any – better than most.

Carl himself knew that unearthly forces were operating when Rachel, his shy bride of three months, a *rebbitsn*, a rabbi's wife, had shamed herself in a way that no one could have expected. The product of an Orthodox Jewish home, a virgin until well into their relationship, a steady and committed person, it made no sense that she would boff a door-to-door cookware salesman wearing a cheesy toupee. No sense at all, yet that is precisely what happened.

As she told it, the salesman, a man well into his fifties gained entrance by the offer of a free gift. After some smarmy conversation, that she admitted did not offend her as it should have, she found herself in his embrace, both of them partially disrobed, on the living room floor, her legs spread (with her complicity, she had to admit) and he upon her, thrusting energetically. Calmly, she recounts she did not remember it being unpleasant. She is sure of that. In fact, when his toupee fell to the carpet, she tried to replace it. But because his head was perspiring and slick, it refused to stay. Charitably, she held it in place. Carl, when he heard her admission, could only pray.

Desperate, he sought help from Provartin, a controversial phar-

When astronomers from Bajone Teche had first discovered the silky, crescent-shaped band in 2003, long after millennium fears had been bruited and disappeared, they doubted it would ever enter our own solar system, and that if it did, it would be perfectly harmless, a belief most of them maintained, even when two years later it made all the navigational adjustments and began vectoring in on Earth itself. The possibility of some sort of cosmic collision had surfaced in 2002, as celestial alignments appeared to be reconfiguring, but the odds of the particles actually penetrating the Earth's atmosphere were given as several billion to one. They were, after all, zillions of miles out into space, had traveled unknown distances from undiscovered stars for unimaginable years – and were probably benign anyway.

By 2007, when the band had entered the atmosphere, then skidded off into the universe, leaving uncountable invisible shards of matter with no detectable physical effect on the planet, most astronomers sighed with relief that the situation had turned out to be harmless – discounting, of course, a new form of bizarre behavior, unexplainable, symptomless, affecting both genders and all classes.

Though scientists argued that the particles, proteinless, virtually without substance, could not be responsible, doubts remained. In time, nearly everyone came to accept the inevitable – a theory that just a year ago was considered unlikely, even radical – that the stellar particles, harmless though they appeared, were the cause of the new phenomena.

Even though it was now ten years after all the sects had predicted wondrous events – the implosion of the Earth, the revivification of Jesus who would walk the Sea of Galilee, the ascendancy of the spiritually pure – none of which had yet occurred, some, and not only the hyperfanatical, believed that Millennium prophecies, delayed but not expired, were beginning to come true, only in a different form than predicted.

Most families had tales to tell of unusual, unnatural actions by the most ordinary of individuals, of children attacking their parents, as when a mother was strangled when her nine-year old caught her in a car window and refused to lower it, and when a

maceutical company claiming an elixir, a derivative of Clozaril, used to treat schizophrenia, called Chlorazine-2, that reversed the effects of the chemical and molecular changes brought on by the invaders. The drug was experimental and in some trials produced side effects such as stiffness in the joints, causing subjects to walk in a herky-jerky, robot-like manner. It also caused listlessness and was said to lessen creativity. But it did negate the effects of the change and restored the individual's original personality. It was hailed as a cure and a salvation.

In a surprise announcement, Nobel laureate, Dr. Jerzy Kovacs came out against Chlorazine-2, saying that human actions had become so predictable over the past several decades that it was no possible to determine shortly after birth the line of work an individual would pursue, the kind of person he would marry, the number of children he would have, even the food he would prefer. Perhaps the invasion from space was the cosmos' way of telling us to loosen up.

In a shocking news conference, Carl and Rachel, holding hands, confessed their actions, and refused Chlorazine-2 treatment, saying that they would accept their new identities as the will of a higher force. Many hailed them as courageous and forward looking; others considered them fools. The battle raged for two years over the correct course of action until the Planetarium Supreme Court, in conjunction with medical authorities, ruled:

*Chlorazine-2 (and Chlorazine-3, its successor, causing even more sedation) are elective drugs, safe and predictable, with acceptable side effects that can be used as directed. Individuals also have the right **not** to use Chlorazine-2 or 3, to select their own level of involvement and risk, a risk that must be borne by all in the interests of a democratic world. Chlorazine will contain CB6, for identification, a harmless dye, causing a slight translucence of the eyes.*

Rafael Weinstein

The Train to Unattain

I inhabit the spaces between the
walls
after the flip of the switch but
before
the dark of the bulb

I am a ruthless cowboy semicolon
forever inserting myself into con-
versations
funny but it always seems to cause

a pause
I ride the hum of the intermission
crowd like a sailor, tying silk
scarves around
each of their nodding heads and

running
the rise of the curtain my only tick-
et in

the only breath I take (breathe)
comes on the twentieth mile
(breathe)
of a thousand-mile drive

when I know that turning around
is no longer an option
and the early morning sun will
blow through the vents like
powdered sugar

I go to the land where nothing can
be had
running down a long hard ribbon
of willful disconnection
a lack of direction so palpable you
could
cut it with a compass

The needle winds its way in and
out of the
continental fabric
pulling me along to Cheyenne,
Wyoming
where my siren, Improvisia
stands upright on the green edge of
a sidewalk
blowing yellow smoke into a rene-
gade sun

In one hand she holds a book of
songs
in the other a bucket of blue paint
dips the one in the other till the
color bleeds out the notes

She hands it to me with an
Andalusian smile and says
Here, it's the one you asked for
open it up and sing, baby,
sing

Michael J. Vaughn

Corn Song

All through the middle of America
there was a trumpeting of corn.
It's full yellow tremendous notes
pressed close to the swelling sky.
There were acres and acres where
the corn blared; consumed the frailer
human reed, swallowed up all lesser
themes, unable to stop itself.

Against the full golden theme of corn
Was the lighter pizzicato of human
voices and the counterpoint of houses;
the bass of barns and lilting passages
of ponds and pastures. Bird calls
were a frill of flutes twisted round
the higher theme, to grace, but only
grace, the symphony of life.

Two coiled themes, the impetuous corn
song and the deliberate accompaniment
of man, bird and beast; each endowed
with the same integrity of purpose
and being, and the music of creation
soared glorious and triumphant through
the heartland of the nation.

Dawn Zapletal

Falling, Falling

The sun was visibly falling;
the sky turned thin green
as the light shifted its weight
pulling the color toward the sea;
then a flash, a momentary shaft
of white slicing the water
like a sword of light.

Merging with the horizon
the sun trailed in its wake
a triangle of burning green;
a flame that lingered as sparks
behind the eyes.

A slow sunset would have soothed,
but there was no setting
to this sun, just a hot falling,
then purple darkness;
the sea suffused with afterglow.

Above the drowned sun Venus
appeared and red Mars;
behind them dim Jupiter,
and night began with sudden stars.

Dawn Zapletal

Monkeys And Swimming

The air is thick and the city is swollen with tourists. In this foreign place the traffic is unbelievable. It's nothing like the traffic back home. Nothing is like it is back home. Of course, I guess that's the point.

And the people too, no shirts or shoes; they are so poor and yet they smile. I doubt if I could smile if I lost my shirt and my shoes. I doubt I could even breathe.

God, the air is thick. When we stepped off the plane it felt like the stewards had wrapped us in blankets, blankets that they'd been keeping in huge tubs of boiling water. Here you are, sir. No, not forever, just for the next two weeks. Don't worry, we'll remove them when it's time for you and your family to leave.

The taxi ride was cheap though, and the woman at the exchange desk at the airport handed me a great big wad of cash even though I had barely given her anything. The driver was nice too. My son, Frank, slept the ride through sitting on my wife's lap. He's a little too big, too old, for that sort of thing, but I imagine he's pretty scared.

That sure was a long flight, nearly seventeen hours. I guess I'm pretty tired myself.

This heat, I can't get used to it. Even with the air conditioning it's too much. I've been up half a dozen times to wet my face and neck, but it doesn't help. Nothing does. Maggie is sleeping fine and Frank is too. I heard that it's different for women, they can handle the heat better than men.

Two weeks. What are we going to do here for two weeks?

The breakfast was outstanding: crapes, sausages, and all their fruits and papaya, lichee, mango and watermelon. Today we're going to take it easy. I didn't get much sleep and Maggie wants to read on the beach, so we're just going to relax. Maybe tomorrow we'll head into town and see what's there.

This morning a woman offered me a massage. She was old and bent over, and on her belt hung glass bottles full of oils like

potions. 80,000 she said, but I knew better. In places like this you have to bargain, it's rude not to. I have to be on my guard too, because in their eyes I'm rich, and when a rich man meets desperate people, he has to take precautions.

She worked for an hour and I gave her 25,000, a fair price we had both agreed on. I lay on the beach all day steeped in these potions she had poured onto me; the coconut oil, the coconut compound, the yogurt, the scented lotus water. Her friends came over every so often and offered us fruits and water, some had watches and sarongs for sale. Maggie held her book up high in front of her face and ignored them while I had a quick look. After a while I got pretty sick of them too, so we went back to our room.

During dinner there was a dance. The music was pleasant, played by old and young men alike. The rhythm was difficult and after some time it bothered me, but Maggie said that she loved the costumes so I kept it to myself. That's a part of marriage it took me some years to learn. To keep quiet or else. Frank was off swimming in the pool with some other boys who were staying at the hotel.

Tomorrow we're going to visit the town, do a little shopping and see what it's really like. These hotels keep you kind of scheduled. I didn't come here to sit in a patio chair talking business, I came here for the real thing. Tomorrow we'll go into town, eat local, and do some shopping ñ I mean, it really is unbelievable how far our money goes here. Afterwards, maybe we'll rent a car and go off on our own for a few days. We could really see the country then. I wonder how Maggie would feel about that. Maybe just me and Frank then.

We left early this morning, it's hard getting up because of the jetlag, but the sun is still low and I can't bear the afternoon heat. There aren't too many tourists out either. The markets here are as crowded as the streets. The man at the front desk warned us about the beach because of the beggars and drug addicts, but we walked along it into the city, regardless; you'd never believe the traffic

here, it was faster walking. Maggie spent a few hours buying things. She picked up something for everyone. Frank and I mostly watched, thankful for the air conditioning. I bought a chess set for 22,000. The guy had asked for 100,000 ñ hand carved, ebony, it took him eight days to make it ñ but it's rude not to bargain. They think that you are being arrogant if you pay too much, flaunting your money. We've got to watch ourselves, because some of these people have a system. Another guest at the hotel told me that sometimes when you are busy concentrating on making a deal, the person you're dealing with signals his brother, or son, and when you're not looking they pick your pocket. And then when you go to pay, and you reach for your wallet, it's not there. Of course, it's very rude to bargain when you know you don't have any money, especially seeing that they guy has been very generous that morning. So every one around starts yelling and crowding in and pulling at you. He told me that sometimes they kidnap or keep something for ransom while you go back and get some money, only it's not the good price you agreed on anymore, it's an extravagant price that you're too afraid not to pay. So I'm watching myself.

Frank seems to like it in the busy markets. He disappears all too easily and Maggie and I have a hard time holding on to him. Mostly he tires quickly and then says he wants to go swimming. Swimming and monkeys, that's all he wants. The swimming's easy and the monkeys we'll see soon enough.

Maggie doesn't seem too hot about going off on our own. She says that it might be dangerous. But our hotel has arranged for a ride, and we're going to go off and visit a few villages in the north. They also phoned ahead and made reservations. She feels safer knowing that someone will know where we are. I tell her that there's nothing to be scared of; they're not animals. Frank is really excited, I guess he takes after me.

But I suppose I know what she means, it does feel awkward sometimes having so much money. Maggie's brother gave me a money belt, but with all this cash it's almost embarrassing. The belt's good for our passports and credit cards and our plane tick-

ets, but it's too small to hold the bills. It really does feel peculiar to have a million bucks in your pocket. And it's no secret, everyone around here knows it. That's why they approach you. As long as you keep one eye open, though, everything'll be fine.

There's the ocean in front of me now, and far behind there's a volcano. This is a small hotel, much smaller than the last and they don't turn on the lights and night and it scares Maggie to walk in the dark. Frank loves it. There aren't too many people staying here either. There's a heavy guy who's got the cabin next to ours. God these walls are so thin that at night in between the crashing of the waves I can hear him snoring away. There's no air conditioning either but the breeze off the water is cool. It's romantic in a way, both beds are shrouded in mosquito nets that hang to the floor on every side. Maggie's nervous about the lizards on the wall, and to tell the truth they startled me a bit too the first time I saw them. When you turn on the lights in the bathroom you can see that about a hundred of them were just there. You don't actually see them, you just see that they were there, traces of them, and no matter how hard you search you can't ever find them. They move so quickly and without a sound and they disappear before your eyes can focus in the new light. Frank spends hours looking for them.

There's a swimming pool full of spring water here, the locals bathe in it. It's mountain water from deep inside the volcano. It's nice though. If you stand in front of the fountain where the fresh water pours in it feels like ice. Maggie's worried that I'll get sick, and I think she's right. It's best not to take chances.

The boys who drove us here told me about this lake in the west. My guidebook says that there isn't too much in the west, but it sounded interesting. There's a huge national park and a few towns but not much other than that. It sounds wild. And that's the only place to see orangutans; there are small monkeys everywhere but I think Frank would love to see the big monkeys like the ones on TV. I doubt Maggie will think that it's a great idea, but it sounds pretty safe to me, so long as we're careful.

We went to this old village today and saw the cockfights. The townspeople were standing in a huge circle which formed a ring for the fighting animals. The owners hold on to them as the crowd screams out their bets. I didn't bet, we just stood off to one side with a boy who was showing us around and watched. It was over quickly and the white one lost. He didn't fight much, he didn't seem to know what he was supposed to do. He just sat there while the other bird flew up into the air and came down on him, stabbing and cutting him with the sharp, metal talons on his feet. After it was over the bloody white one was placed on the other's cage. It was his trophy. All over town cocks stood in wicker cages with other cocks lying, skinned above them.

Barbarians. That's what Maggie said, but even though I don't really understand it, it doesn't seem right to call them barbarians. Besides it's part of their religion. She kept Frank back, so he didn't get to see any of it. He's too young for that sort of thing.

It's all set. Tomorrow Frank and I are going off to that lake. I assured Maggie that it'd be safe, the hotel manager set it up for us. We leave at seven and eat lunch somewhere on the lake and we'll be back in the evening. It cost more than I expected, but I don't want to take any chances. We've got insurance and we've taken the malaria prophylactic, even though we were told that it wasn't malaria season.

Wayan will be our guide. He's the brother of one of the boys who drove us here. I'm leaving my money belt with Maggie and only taking a little cash so if something happens I'll just tell them to search me, that I don't have any money.

We'll be fine.

Frank was so excited last night that he barely slept a wink; I heard him tossing about. The heat doesn't seem as bad up here. But those waves, I never saw much of the ocean growing up, I wonder what it is about them.

Wayan was waiting for us in his truck. Maggie seemed pretty

upset but I don't think Frank noticed. We'll be fine. She's overreacting, I mean these people aren't animals, they're not. We'll be fine.

The ride was hell; those winding roads. Frank loved it. He's a kid after all, they love that sort of thing, but not me. It was two hours long and that was two hours too long. Wayan was laughing at me with Frank, they said my face was green. I don't doubt that it was. I was very happy when we got here.

The lake looks like a river and not a lake. It has a current and is narrow, but Wayan assures me that it's a lake, that this is just a small part of it. There's a dugout canoe half on the shore and half in the water waiting for us. Wayan tells us we have to wait for his cousin. Two guys show up though, his cousin and his uncle. It makes me nervous but I don't want Frank to notice. Three of them and two of us, not even two, just me really.

I was at a Christmas party once and the hosts kept on yelling at the help they had hired. It was terrible how they acted, it made everyone at the party very uncomfortable. Maggie and I left early. The servants were from a third world country and I remember hearing one of the hosts threatening to send them "back to their stinking mud huts." He must have felt so superior. He was in control that night. But now, if he threatened these guys like he treated his help at the Christmas party, well, he'd—I know him, and he just wouldn't treat these guys like that, not here at least, because out here they are the ones who are in control.

The uncle hasn't said a word to anybody. He is old, much older than I am, and sitting to my left, just staring straight ahead. Frank is sitting in front of me and Wayan and his cousin are in the back. The boat's engine rattles and smokes and we are drawing a lot of water; too much. The water is only about four inches from the edge of the boat and the gas line isn't even a real gas line, it looks like a garden hose. Frank is looking deep into the forest, searching for the monkeys I have promised him. I don't think he really cares about the boat or all the strange people in it. None of

the men wear shirts. They are muscular and brown and their fingernails are hard and worn from years of work.

I try to seem friendly. I talk and answer questions to all three of them but only Wayan answers. The uncle has his arm in the water up to his elbow and small whirlpools fall from its wake. I don't think he even knows where he is, or that he isn't there alone. The cousin has a knife in his hand and is gently passing a stone along the blade as he looks straight at me. He makes me very nervous, and I put my hand on Frank's shoulder while pointing to something on the shore. I put myself between them.

The gas fumes are awful and I am starting to feel sick. The lake never really opens up and becomes a lake but it isn't long before Frank and I see some orangutans. Wayan points them out to us and they seem to come out on cue just as we turn our heads to look.

The gas is leaking out into the boat and Wayan and his cousin have raised their feet onto the bench the uncle and I are sharing. I make a remark but Wayan dismisses it quickly saying that we have plenty of gas and that isn't out of the ordinary. I am calm though. Besides, these types of motors are complicated, even I would have a tough time keeping them in good running condition.

The cousin's knife is sharp now and he is working at a block of dark wood and the uncle is leaving a long trail of whirlpools for us to follow back to the truck.

Why are they here?

Late in the morning Wayan turns towards the shore and beaches the tired canoe. Lunch time. I am thinking of the Christmas party again as we follow them into the jungle. I keep Frank near me as Wayan leads us down a path. I think to myself that it is impossible, all these things that *could* happen, they are all impossible. Maggie knows where we are, the hotel, my God I signed a contract. But I didn't really read it. And where was my copy? Jesus, these guys aren't supposed to be here. Why are they lagging so far behind? And where's Wayan taking us? If I ask he'll suspect something. It's best to keep this to myself. There's no

need to start this sooner than it has to start. There's no reason to frighten Frank.

Wait. This is ridiculous. I really have to get a grip on myself. These people are good people; it's like I said, they *aren't* animals. Wayan's a good kid and so he's brought some company with him, that's all. He doesn't even speak English that well. They are here to help him out and I'm doing a fine job ruining this trip. I'm starting to sound like Maggie.

They probably just want some money. Maybe they think that I'll tip them too when this is all over. But I didn't bring any extra money. I'll just tell them that. They'll be disappointed but there's nothing I can do about that, is there? I just don't have the money. I should have expected this sort of thing though. It's my fault, really.

It's a good thing Maggie gave me that bottled water; you can't drink the water here. They drink it, but it's not safe for us. And she told me that the meat has to be well-cooked. Anyway, I doubt that there will be any meat for lunch, it's too expensive, probably just rice and vegetables. Eating out here can still be a little risky. There are all sorts of things that can get into your food and cause all sorts of problems.

Wayan's uncle caught some fish and they are grilling them for us on dried up coconut shells. It smells great but I don't think it's a good idea. The fish wasn't really clean, and the coconut shells had been piled waist high in a mound, damp and most likely filled with insects. The uncle ground up garlic, shallots, all sorts of little red and green peppers, Candle nuts and other exotic things on a large rock. He used a stone he found on the ground as a pestle. Every knock of the stone released a new aroma that hung in the thick air like smoke. It was really incredible. His wrists worked furiously at the mixture and when he was done he applied it to both sides of the halved fish. He lapped the red stuff on in handfuls, smearing it on thickly like a child would. His hands and forearms are stained red, even his fingernails are a deep crimson. God! It smelled fantastic, but it isn't worth it. Too bad, really, but I've been sick enough as it is; every morning on the toilet. You know how it is in these places.

We ended up eating the rice and then some bananas for desert while they finished all the fish. Even the bottled water tastes odd. Frank is chasing lizards. I told him that he'd have better luck trying to hold onto his own shadow, but he doesn't listen to me. The three of them are sitting off near the smoldering coconuts. I feel bad for having refused their meal. Wayan tried to explain to the others that I was only being safe, for Frank's sake, but I don't think they understand.

The sun is high above us and I don't think I've ever perspired more in my life. It feels like when I was kid, sick with the flu, towel draped over my head, breathing in the steam. It feels just like that only there isn't any towel and I don't have the flu. It doesn't seem to bother them; they never even sweat an ounce.

At the Christmas party I remember Maggie telling me that poor people are more beautiful than we are. I didn't think so then, but now, here, I think she's right. Look at me, pale, sweating like a horse, overweight, and them, lean, comfortable, beautiful.

Wayan walks us back to the boat. The uncle is coming with us but the cousin is staying behind. He lives out here I guess, but I didn't see a house. I'd have liked to give him something. He grilled those fish really well. I really can't believe I thought they were going to— well, I'll give Wayan a nice tip and make sure he knows to pass some of it on to him.

The whirlpools again; the uncle let his other arm drag in the water as we move back in the direction we came. I hadn't noticed how quiet it is out here this morning; not quiet exactly, because there are a million noises in the jungle, just peaceful. A million noises, but you rarely see anything move. We saw the orangutans that Wayan had pointed out, and Frank saw some water snakes, but other than that is just the lizards in the bathroom. You could swear that you'd seen them, because you think you know what they look like, but they disappear before your brain has the time to register them. In a flash they're all gone.

We run out of gas about five hundred yards from the truck and Wayan has to jump in and walk us to the shore. The water is murky, it looks much deeper than it really is. He just hopped out without a word and only went in chest deep. It startled me, and Frank laughed excitedly. Funny, I could have sworn that it was really deep. The water is pitch black, I figured it was a hundred feet deep. Frank likes Wayan. They get along well. Of course, I'm never too far off and that probably reassure him. He sites in the front with us on the way home. The uncle stayed back with the canoe and never said a word to us, not even when we left.

It is dark when we pull in and Maggie is sitting in a chair waiting for us. She worries.

It is nice to shower, cold water, but very refreshing. Frank went to bed early, but in the shower I can hear him telling Maggie all about our day: the wild ride there; the dugout canoe; the old man; the monkeys and the water snakes; the coconut fire, and Wayan's swimming. Monkeys and swimming, that's all this is for him.

The water is cool and feels great on my scalp. I love pushing the top of my head against the shower head and letting the icy water run through my hair and down my neck. I look down at my feet and a stream of water pours off my nose like a fountain. God, that's the greatest thing in the world, one of them at least.

Maggie seems happy to have us back. She is petting Frank's hair and watching him sleep when I come in from the bathroom. Lying next to her I stop myself from telling her that it has turned out just as I said it would; that I had told her everything would be fine. I keep quiet and fall asleep just knowing.

Eric Costen

Teach me to embrace the lie,
Hold my fettered heart against
Searing burner until I cry,
Teach me to hold my bitter tongue,
Rip offending flesh from my foul mouth,
From which ungrateful words have sprung
Then teach me to still,
Resist not worries, horrors harbored
Until this lurid dream—
Breaks my will.

Ben Stivers

Late Night on a Commuter Train

Glowing fluorescent green
Worm
Writhes within an ocean of pin-hole lights.
White bearded black man sits across from me
Wearing yellow head-phones.
I want it to be Coltrane,
And imagine a tenor saxophone sound-tracking our
journey,
But the man never taps a foot or a finger with me;
He just rocks with the creaking vessel
Defeated.
Seems like no one will ever smile on a commuter train
Except a visitor in a sleeping city,
Like me.

Michael Moriarty

Susan

Black-eyed Susan,
her father called her.
Her father had black eyes, too,
but they were also yellow
around the iris, apart from the pupil.
Susan's were all black, solid and pure.
Her father's name was Matthew,
but no one called him black-eyed Matthew –
they called him Matt –
a short, crisp appellation,
like the sound of a stem breaking.
When Susan saw black-eyed Susans
she did not think of herself
but of her father, Matt –
his eyes had been gold, hair gold, beard gold – a radiant man.

When Susan was small
he brought her bunches of the flowers
and she would bury her face in the scent.
Her father is buried now, interred under brown ground.

As Susan grew old, she felt a longing inside her
but she didn't know why,
as though she could feel her eyes lightening
and her hair growing dark.

As her eyes changed, gray flecks crept into the black
like a vein of gray stone in black rock.

She wore a gray sweater
When she went back to where
the black-eyed Susans once grew.

Musing about her father's death,
She put the store-bought flowers on his grave
because it was October
and black-eyed Susans weren't in bloom.
she bought them from a florist
where no one could have known
that her name was Susan
or her hair had once been gold.

Ellen Lindquist

Dragonflies Mating

Loops of lust.
Parabolas of glide.
Signatures of merge.
Lariats of flight lassoing light
above the still green pond.
Piggyback paramours
as acrobatic energetic
as adolescent pilots
zigging zagging, genes as ancient
as arrows of noon sunlight
jet swift wings reflect and dodge.
Shore splash of a bullfrog
fails to wrinkle curls of flight.
On and on, into white noon,
elongated emeralds, sapphires,
jeweled wires circuiting air
the way they were doing when our curiosity
was but a mild glow in the synapses of shrews.
They airshow much longer than seed egg requires,
filling their void with gymnastics of love.

Lee Slonimsky

And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that
was the name thereof.

I'm Carole, for Lombard with her Thirties chic.
In old movies she's my mother, leaving lipstick on a
glass,
and in her shimmering sheath, fox-trotting cheek-
to-cheek before sipping a demitasse.

Rather than e called after a star,
disappeared in brilliance too soon, I'd have Djuna.
or the nickname my brother thinks bizarre
for a woman, "Honey."

Though I worship my brother's pinstriped style,
his name is no longer fashionable.
With our bootlegger father's debonair smile,
he's the dapper dark double

of our natty father, Harry, a man
whose early death I can't undo.
So I hear, "For God, King Harry and England,"
rather than "that parvenu."

Father found humped over the steering wheel,
mother walked in rain and died. Her name
recalls Princess Margaret who gave up her ideal
R.A.F. lover, yet she survived the Blitz's flames.

into the dignity of old-fashioned lives.
and now my granddaughter renews
19th century Emmas, like Darwin's and Hardy's wives

Today, holding Margaret, her baby sister,
my dead mother's come home,
and all I have missed is in a kiss,
as I speak her name.

Carole Stone

Springtime, nineteen sixty nine
Roy and I drove all the way
from Cincinnati to New York City
twenty year old farm kids
who'd never been anywhere
driving all night, sixteen hours straight through
even the truck stops along the way
an adventure, stopping
for eye-popping coffee
staring at my reflection in greasy
florescent lighted mirrors
the simple fact of going somewhere
difficult to comprehend.

Walking around Greenwich Village
wide-eyed and gawking
trying to sleep in a dive off Washington Square
the Hotel earl
bare light bulbs and no t.p.
street kids pitching pennies
outside out window at midnight.

roy now a continent away
and twenty years distant
but certain springtime mornings I recall
the musty smell of that room
and morning rain on empty city streets.

Donna Clement

Eddie's Tavern

The tavern emerged like a day's growth of beard on Newark's time-worn face. The vacant repair shop had been snatched from the hands of the wrecking crew, and its dusty interior became the refuge of Eddie McDonough. Eddie replaced the rotting ceiling beams, did some serious damage with his cleaning rag, and hung checkered cloth over the rest. Then he put his wooden tavern sign out and opened the place for business.

The idea of a bar in a mostly residential area didn't sit well with the nervous types, but something about the big lug who owned it made people relax-and congregate. Within a few weeks the tables were home to the wire-factory workers, then some of the old couples drifted in. Before long, one or two of the suits were stopping by on the way home. It was a good mix. The beer flowed.

The tavern became part of the landscape like the chalk-marked sidewalks and yellow fire hydrants. Eddie was always there, tending bar and serving coffee and cold sandwiches. He kept pretzels on the tables and made sure there were napkins for the ladies. He especially liked the ladies. He would gently slip the polyester-fur trimmed coats up onto their shoulders, wondering how those delicate skins survived the cold. He marveled at the razor-like fingernails that could pop off without warning and shook his head as he watched those ankles teetering on stiletto heels-God love 'em.

The ladies liked Eddie, too. Pretty soon they were bringing in their sisters for company or their new boyfriends for inspection. That was only natural. With Eddie they found total acceptance, a friend in the enemy camp. There was no hand so rough that Eddie wouldn't plant a little kiss on. He treated the street-wise the same as the prima donnas-they deserved only the best. Most of them had learned that the best-that place where they were respected, loved, valued by someone they loved in return-was out of reach. But Eddie's smile and that look that said he felt their pain gave them hope, and his encouragement gave them confidence. He became every gal's big brother and every guy's buddy.

So they came and came again, until Eddie couldn't keep up with them.

He hired Pete to help at the bar, but Eddie was everywhere, greeting and taking care of his people. Eddie had ears for every sad or funny story his customers wanted to share, but he didn't talk much about himself. Pete usually helped Eddie close at about one in the morning, and one night he asked, "Eddie, what'd you do before you got this place? You from Jersey?"

Eddie rounded the tip of his cigarette on the edge of the ashtray and put it back into the corner of his mouth where it lived from morning 'til night. He spoke around it in a raspy voice, one eye squinted to keep out the smoke that rose over his ruddy cheek. "Brooklyn. I'm from Brooklyn. Me and the wife had a café." He looked out the window then, as if there might be some explanation of the past in the misty street. "But that was a long time ago."

Pete bent to sweep the day's debris into the dustpan and looked up at Eddie's narrow brow. "Don't mind me askin', but where's your wife now? You two split up?"

Eddie held the cigarette between two fingers and rubbed one heavy black eyebrow with his thumb. "Yeah, you could say we split up." Eddie took a wipe at the bar and said, "Well, I'm goin' upstairs. Lock up, will ya?"

The apartment above the bar had two rooms and a bath. Eddie had furnished it with a queen-size bed and little else. He lived in the room below, where the life was. He stripped down to his boxer shorts and undershirt and lay on the bed. The streetlight shining over his head cast a spotlight on the wall. He made a rabbit of his hand, then tried a dog. He grinned a little and thought of Maggie.

Maggie had gotten such a kick out of little things like shadow puppets. One of her favorite performers had been that guy on Ed Sullivan who did monkeys that chattered and birds that billed and cooed. She was amazed that he could make so much out of nothing but a bit of light and shadow shaped in his hands.

Their life together was full of promise then. They worked side-by-side in the café, then went home to Maggie's brownstone. It was hers, all right. Her quilts were on the beds, her curtains at the

well-scrubbed windows. The aroma of her cooking filled the kitchen, and her laughter warmed the rooms.

With time, the café prospered, and the things they had dreamed of became reality. They had everything they needed, except the children. After she miscarried the third one, Maggie found it hard to stay connected with ordinary life. She drifted into a world of dark fantasy, where she couldn't tell the shadows from the real thing.

Eddie clasped his hands behind his head and thought back once again on the things Maggie had said. She had tried to tell him, to warn him while there was still time. One night stayed in his memory, though it was much like other nights when Maggie couldn't sleep. It was the beginning of the end.

He had walked into the dim light of the living room, stopped in the doorway, and shaded his eyes. "What are you doin' up?"

"I can't sleep." Maggie was sitting on the floor, folding towels and putting them in neat stacks around her scrunched-up legs.

"What, you're doing laundry in the middle of the night? The doctor told you to get your rest. Come on, you shouldn't be working now."

"This isn't work. It's just something to do with my hands. I love the way they smell right out of the dryer." She buried her face in a towel.

Eddie had rubbed his eyes, lowered his big frame onto the rug, and pulled a towel out of the basket. His hands were good for wielding a hammer, moving furniture, and wrenching lids from pickle jars, but he had no talent for neat folds, even when wide awake.

Eddie folded a towel, then looked at his work and said, "That's pretty good, huh?"

Maggie laughed. You wouldn't make a very good wife."

"Yeah, I know-my tits ain't big enough."

Maggie hit him in the arm, but she couldn't keep back the laugh. Eddie's grin was a mile wide.

Eddie said, "I didn't hear you get up. What you been doin' all this time?"

"Oh, just puttering around, cleaning up the baby's room."

"I thought you wasn't gonna do that anymore." He stopped mid-fold and touched her arm. "Honey, you gotta try to put that behind you."

"How can I?" Maggie spoke to a larger audience-the air, the room, the house, anybody. "There's supposed to be a baby in there, and two more sleepin' and coughin' and wettin' the bed in the other room." Her voice was edged with anger.

"What can I tell you? It's out of our hands. Everybody's got troubles-*you* hear the talk in the café." He touched her chin and turned her face toward his. "Don't you know how crazy I am about you?" He stroked her hair, silvery in the dim light. "You're gonna be okay."

She looked at Eddie. "I don't see how. *Once* I could understand, but three times? I think somebody's trying to tell me something. It's like I did something wrong, and this is my punishment. I can't figure it out-I'm running out of things to confess. I don't know-maybe I've got too much pride."

"You can't think of any sins to confess 'cause you ain't got any. You're the best person I know. Besides, it don't work that way. You're not being punished. Maybe you're havin' such a hard time 'cause you're lonely with me gone so much. Hey, maybe we oughta get a dog. Wha'd'ya think?"

"A dog, Eddie?" She glared at him. "You just don't get it, do you? If we don't have a family, what am I going to do with the rest of my life? All those years we put off having kids 'til we could make a good home for 'em..." She looked around the dim room, full of things she had carefully placed there- cut glass vases, shelves of bric-a-brac, water colors, clusters of family pictures on the piano. "So I make curtains, do the baby's room all pink and blue, I cook, I scrub, I dust..."

Eddie pushed aside the towels and pulled her into his arms. "So we won't get a dog. When you get strong again you'll come back and work the café wit' me, and it'll be just like before. You and me." He rocked gently and held her while she cried one more time.

After a while he had said, "Come on. Let's get back to bed."

"I don't want to. As soon as I start to fall asleep, I hear one of

those voices again."

Eddie could feel all the blood draining to his feet. That voice business scared the hell out of him. "What? I thought that was all over."

As far back as high school, Maggie had heard strange voices. She'd always had a nervous disposition, but when the voices started, her parents had put her in a home for six months. When she got back to school, she felt awkward around her friends, at a loss to explain what had happened to her. Then she met Eddie. She fit under his arm as she'd been molded there. And Eddie had loved her, in spite of the voices.

"When did it start again?"

"A couple of nights ago. It was a woman's voice this time, telling me something about the baby. I can't understand a lot of what she says; she talks real rough like she's out of breath."

"Maggie, you're talking like that voice is a real person. Remember what Dr. Blake told you-it's your own head talking to you."

"I know, but it feels like somebody else. And tonight I heard the baby crying."

"Our baby isn't crying, Maggie. He's in Heaven. You probably heard a baby in the neighborhood."

"A mother knows her own baby's cry."

By that time, Eddie had gotten to his feet. His gut feeling told him to grab Maggie and run from the house, leaving the voices behind them. He began to pace.

"It just seems like your baby 'cause it's your own voice you're hearin'."

"I know-the things I hear are only in my head-but I can hear the baby crying and I feel like I should go to him-like he's hungry and cold."

"Listen to me. The voice and the crying you hear ain't *real*." He pulled her gently to her feet and guided her toward their bedroom. "Tomorrow you'll go see Dr. Blake, and everything will be fine. Now come on and get into bed like a good girl."

"O.K., but leave the door open so I can hear... Oh, never mind."

ished began to seem curious, as if they belonged to someone she didn't know. Sometimes she didn't even know Eddie. But he was there, just out of reach, trying to get closer. She saw him finally as a face pressed too tight against a window-large oval eyes and bulbous nose and lips spread in a fat clown smile.

Eddie shifted in bed, away from the spotlight on the wall, and started humming "Be Kind to Your Web-Footed Friends," but the memory came anyway. *Break down door, bathtub, blood, blood, blood.*

That was the trouble with staying put. Once the memory happened, it took up residence in the place. Now it would come back whenever he saw the street light reflected on the wall. He'd have to move the bed to the other side of the room or put a shade on the window. Of course the room would be completely dark then.

Winter was coming on early. Blackened slush lined the streets and piled up around telephone poles and trash cans. The postman slipped along his foot route, and the stray cats got more daring. Strangers began to stop in at the tavern to get out of the weather. Eddie took them all in, and most of the newcomers got captured by the place. Oldies beat the sweet rhythm from the jukebox, the murmur of friends talking filled the air, and laughter danced from table to table.

One evening a young woman came to just inside the door and blew on her hands, gloved in soft yellow kid not meant to keep out the cold. She looked over the room and found a remote table with only one chair. She made her way through the network of tables, apologizing as she bumped an elbow or ruffled someone's hair. Eddie maneuvered around the tables around the woman, patting backs and pinching cheeks. He deposited a fresh bowl of pretzels and said, "Hi. What's your pleasure? We got great strawberry daiquiris tonight."

"Scotch, straight up," she said, meeting his eyes only briefly.

Eddie said, "Sure thing." He brought the scotch and tried to make a little conversation, but she wasn't interested. After her

hung up her coat-a real fox-and coaxed a smile out of her. Then he brought a glass of the good stuff from the back room and pulled up another chair. "Cold outside, huh?"

"Yes, the wind goes right through you. When I got off the bust I just couldn't face the walk home." A look of vulnerability passed quickly over her face. "Have a match?" she said as she deftly took a cigarette from a gold case.

Eddie fished a lighter from his shirt pocket and steadied her hand as he lit the cigarette. It was a very delicate hand with long fingers and fine skin, a little chapped from the cold. He looked into her face. It was beautifully made. Her hair was glossy, almost blond, and pulled back from her eyes, which shone amber in the candlelight. Her movements spoke of finishing school; she didn't belong in a tavern. She blew a stream of smoke down and to her left, away from Eddie. He had an impulse to touch the pout of her lips as the smoke slipped over them, and he rubbed his hand over his face to clear his head.

"I never seen you around before the other night. You new in town?"

"Yes; I lived on Sutton Place."

Eddie's stomach flipped over at the wounded look in her eyes, which was quickly replaced by something more knowing. Like the look of a cat who just remembered about dogs.

"Tired of life in the city, huh?"

"Something like that. Could I have another drink?"

Eddie signaled Pete for the scotch, smiled, and said, "I'm glad you came to this part of town. This old joint needed a pretty new face. What's your name?"

"Gloria. Are you Eddie?"

"Yeah, that's me. Owner, bartender, and mother hen." His pleasure in his position rolled into a broad smile that stayed on his face until he plugged the inevitable cigarette into his mouth and lit up.

"Are you always this full on week nights?" Gloria said, surveying the couples holding hands and groups of friends intent on

nothing good on TV tonight. Say, you hungry? I got some Irish stew simmerin' in the back; it's real good."

"Stew? I guess that will do. It's so hard to cook for one anyway."

Eddie brought the stew and neglected to add it to her tab. Her finely tailored clothes didn't fool him. He knew she had fallen on hard times.

Gloria came in often after that. She looked a little less polished each time, but she carried herself like a lady. Eddie was really taken with her. He looked for her to come in, watched her from behind the bar, and was at her beck and call. Except she wasn't calling. She was friendly enough, but he couldn't get her to open up in spite of everything he did. It nearly drove him crazy. Most of his customers told him things they wouldn't tell a priest.

One night when the tavern was quiet, and rain washed softly over the windows, Eddie sat across from Gloria at her little table in the back. They had talked about her sandwich, the weather, the crowd, then Eddie slipped in, "Do you work in the city?"

Gloria swirled her drink and looked into the glass, not at Eddie. "I'm between jobs right now. Sort of re-thinking my career goals." Then she laughed and downed the rest of her drink in one gulp.

"Oh, I know how that is. Y'know, I got an extra room if you need someplace to stay." He got red in the face then and quickly added, "I wouldn't touch you or nothin' like that."

"You're sweet, Eddie. No wonder everyone likes you. Sometimes it even gives me courage to be around you. I'll think about your offer. Now will you get me another drink before I go?"

Long after closing, Eddie sat in his little apartment, listening to the rain and picturing Gloria's face. *I want to hold her so bad I can taste it.* The thought lurked in the back of his mind, but he was practiced at avoiding things he didn't want to think about. *Just keep busy.*

He kept thinking he smelled Gloria's perfume. It wasn't strong

or flowery like the fragrances a lot of the women wore-it was kind of odd, almost musky. And it lingered. Even a hot shower didn't get rid of it.

She was such a mystery. So classy. What the hell had happened to her? As he puzzled over it, he thought of their conversations. Small talk. No sharing, no risk.

And what if they did talk? What if some quiet night he lit her cigarette and said, "You know, I was married once."

She'd say, "That doesn't surprise me. You're a very nice man."

Or maybe she just say "Really," the way people do when they don't care what you're talking about. But he got the feeling that she did care. Sometimes she looked into his eyes as if he was the most important person in the world. Like he was her best friend.

So then he'd get brave and say, "You ever been married?"

"No," she'd reply.

Or maybe, "Yes, I got married after I graduated from Vassar." No, she didn't seem like a Vassar snob. More like Harvard Business School. One of those briefcase women. Maybe she'd say, "I got married after completing law school."

Then he'd ask, "Are you still married?" and she'd say, "No, I'm on my own now." Then she'd give him one of those looks that says, "don't pry."

But what if he didn't give up? What if he said, "Me too. My wife died five years ago. It's really rough without her."

Would she say, "I'm so sorry. I know how lonely that can be. Sometimes I'm so lonely I could scream." Or just, "I'm so sorry."

Would he have the courage to say, "It ain't just that I'm lonely. I'm lonely even when the tavern's full of people I really like to be around. I listen while they talk about their kids and their mortgages and their troubles, and I really like that. But I'm still lonely. It's like something's wrong with the whole world."

Could he take her hand and say, "Who hurt you? Why are you living in Jersey when you've got that midtown look all over you?"

Maybe she'd say, "I did something wrong, and I'm being punished."

Or, "You're very perceptive. I had a facial at Elizabeth Arden every week. I spent two hundred dollars a week just on my nails. My clothes came from Bergdorf's. I went from my office suite to the bank in a chauffeured Rolls. Now I have nothing. No money, no job, no man, no friends, no hope."

But she'd never say that.

She'd say, "I know I don't belong here. I simply have no place else to go."

And he'd say, "I want you here. I wanna take care of you."

Maybe he'd say, "My wife killed herself right under my nose and I couldn't stop her and I miss her so much and I want another chance and I think I love you and I want you so bad I can taste it!"

But he couldn't say that.

Christmas was coming, and the tavern grew crowded with shoppers and merry-makers, but Gloria was not among them. Eddie began to worry that something had happened to her. Even if she was going back to the city, she would have said goodbye. He just knew it.

It was after New Year's when she came in again. The back tables were taken by kids who stopped off after a show to drink and fondle each other in the dark, so Gloria sat up front. Pete got her a scotch, and when Eddie came out of the back room, she was smiling toward him. He parked the tray of glasses he carried and walked over. "Hi. Good to have you back. I missed you. Was Santa Claus good to you?"

"Let's just say better things are ahead." She looked refreshed and calm, almost peaceful.

"Yeah, maybe for the both of us. It's a new year, y'know. Do you need a place to stay? My offer's still open."

"No, I don't need a place anymore. But I do have something for you." She took the gold cigarette case from her purse and handed it to Eddie.

"What's this for?"

"I just want you to have it. It's the only good thing I have left."

"You mean you want me to loan you money on it? Hey, you

don't need to give me nothin'. If you need money, I got it. We'll consider it a loan if you want to, but you keep your pretty case. I'd look silly carryin' that little thing in these big mitts anyway." He smiled from somewhere deep in his chest.

"You don't understand. I'm going away for a while, and I want you to keep it to remember me by. It's worth something, and I know you'll appreciate it and take care of it for me, o.k.?"

"Sure, whatever you want, but don't stay gone too long." Eddie slipped the case into his pants pocket then squeezed her hand and said he'd be back later.

Eddie worked the bar, talking to his regulars on the barstools, slicing salami, and drawing beer from the tap. But his eyes kept drifting back to Gloria. He watched her light a cigarette, take a drag or two, and put it out. Then she reached into her purse and took something out. The pistol glinted in the dim light just before she put it in her mouth. Eddie watched, puzzled, then frozen. She looked at him then, and in that moment his eyes, pleading, said all the things he wanted to tell her. Then he bellowed
Nooooooooooooooooo!

When he next became aware of his surroundings, he was kneeling on the floor with his head in her lap. She sat quietly in her chair, stroking his hair and murmuring "It's o.k. Everything's going to be o.k." She had placed the unfired pistol on the table alongside her cocktail napkin, like a utensil she hadn't needed after all.

After the ambulance came, and the people left, Eddie looked around the room, so familiar, yet somehow changed. What had been a refuge and a place for forgetting had, in that moment that she stopped wanting to die, become a place of absolution. He had saved someone; he had not let her die. The room was still as a sanctuary. He walked to the front door, treading lightly so as not to disturb the silence. Then he stepped outside and breathed in the clean, cold, early morning air. The sign over his head read "Eddie's Tavern." He reached up and gently set it in motion. It swayed in the street light, its pale shadow dancing on the tavern wall. In Memory

Cathy Anderson

In Memory

When I answered the phone I heard my father's voice. It wasn't really a voice. For some things there are no words. It was an anguished sob. It was an unspeakable heartrending wail. I will never forget the sound of it. And the terror it evoked. The primitive, paralyzing, oppressive, panic-laden terror that gripped me when I heard my father. He asked me politely to come to his house.

"Your brother has offed himself." I remember these words exactly. They, coupled with the promise of eternal pain, are part of the scar that regularly calls attention to itself in my soul.

I walked out to our driveway. My husband was fiddling with the lawnmower. It was a weekend. I would, of course, remember it was Saturday. The sun was setting. I stood above the lawnmower. "My brother is dead. He killed himself."

My husband caught the horrible dread instantly. I could see the alarm rush across his features. There would be no incubation period for this epidemic. My brother, the terrorist, had struck.

He looked up at me, momentarily, grasping a spark plug in his gentle clenched fist. Our eyes locked in awesome silence.

"Your whole body is trembling," he said to me. "I've never seen anyone's body do that."

I was sick then. So sick. My body emptied itself. I wanted to live.

I hadn't been in my parent's house for a long time – years. I knew my mother raised terrorists. She hugged me when she saw me. I saw my sister, the psychologist, over mother's shoulder. A stranger sat in the chair to Valerie's left.

"How are you feeling right now?" my sister, the psychologist, questioned me before I could even lower my heavy, weak self into a chair.

"Shut-up, Valerie," I said.

"This is Dr. Weiner, Stan's psychiatrist," my mother introduced

day my brother was buried.

She went on. She was gracing me with the gift of being readmitted to her inner circle at a moment of great import. "Dr. Weiner admitted Stan to the hospital on Tuesday. He was on a 24-hour watch. We knew he was suicidal. But he evaded the nurses and hung himself with a humidifier cord in the bathroom."

She said this without emotion. We were all emotionless, except my father, who gasped intermittently. Shock kills.

"Valerie," he said, "will you call the rabbi?"

The air in my parent's house was starting to smother me. I was having trouble breathing.

I turned to Dr. Weiner. "People think we're a perfect family. Mother thinks that. It's never been a good time to confront the problems."

"Now isn't a good time," Dr. Weiner replied softly.

"I'm not feeling that good. Do you think I should leave?"

"No, not at all. It's just now isn't a good time."

My sister, the psychologist, returned to the room. "The rabbi says to call the mortuary. He wants to talk to you." She spoke to my mother.

This was a test for my mother. She would not allow this tragedy to destroy her. The world would see the stuff she was made of. Through the thick oppressive silence of a room full of permanent victims, we heard her restrained voice speaking to the rabbi. Her words were no audible, but they were exquisitely controlled. She would be so proud of herself.

My father put his head in his hands and began to cry softly. "Oh God, Oh God," he kept rocking his head back and forth. My father was a physician. He always earned a lot of money. We all watched my father. Beside him on top of their stereo was a picture of my wedding and one of my brother, the terrorist, fifteen years ago in his Bar Mitzvah suit.

I was trembling a little. I hoped I wouldn't get sick some more.

I turned to Dr. Weiner again. "I just quit smoking a few months ago."

I wanted to comfort him. I didn't think my mother, the society lady, was the lawsuit type. It was definitely not her favorite kind of publicity.

My mother returned to the room and stood looking at my tormented father. "I called your sisters. The funeral will be at 1:00 tomorrow. They'll let everyone know." Always the organizer. She would chair a major fundraiser for the symphony in a month. If I had to bet on it I would say she was the terrorist's chosen victim. Sad to say, the bullet just grazed her. The rest of us were having the hemorrhage. It was much later when my sister said, in all seriousness, that he ruined her summer.

My father didn't respond except to look at her with the glazed eyes of a hostage damned to endless hell. Finally he stood up. It looked like a massive effort. "I better call my office."

My mother followed him out of the room. She looked hunched over and shuffled.

"I didn't know Stan was in the hospital," I told Dr. Weiner. "I haven't been a part of the family for several years. I needed to get out."

"So did he."

When Dr. Weiner said this I didn't know if he was giving a psychiatric evaluation or an interpretation of Stan's suicide.

"Where's Mark?" My sister changed the subject.

"He's mowing the lawn," I paused. "We didn't want Joshie to be here right now, so I just drove over myself." I shuddered when I thought of my son. I wanted him to live.

Suddenly, I felt an urgent need to leave. Valerie would stay with them. They had some kind of pact anyway with Valerie. It wasn't new either. It was very old.

"I need to leave," I told Dr. Weiner. I looked at Valerie. "Tell Mom and Dad I'll be back tomorrow. I need to go away now."

"I think you should stay," my sister, the psychologist said.

"I know you do, Valerie." Weiner looked at me with what I believed was respect. Later I realized that feeling probably came from inside me. It lasted all the way home. I wanted to see my

son. It felt like an emergency.

I kissed his sleeping face and stroked his head when I got home, deeply relieved to be out of my parent's prison. The first tear spilled on to his little pajama top. Later there would be an endless supply pouring out in torrents or dripping one by one in flashes of memory. The flow would last some two years and wash away the grief of all our lost selves and soothe the reality of mortality. "Oh God, Oh God."

I awoke very early the next morning in the beginnings of lightness with a new badge my brother had unwittingly given me. I wasn't yet aware of it. I looked out at the coming morning and listened to the uproarious chirping of the birds. It was spring. Had they heard the news? I wanted to live.

Diana Sher

Bud Wolfe

When I was a kid in Chicago, I used to go down the alley to Bud Wolfe's garage. It sat in the back of his house like a tombstone. "You stay away from there," my dad said. "That man should be run out of the neighborhood."

"How's it hangin', Junior?" Wolf would ask, sliding out from the underbelly of a car.

He was always working on cars: leaning under a hood, turning bolts, pulling out mysterious looking parts.

"You know a person by the company he keeps," my father said. My father was smart; he ran his own business and seemed to know a lot about life. He was good with cards, too, he did tricks for me and my friends and I knew that at one point in his career he'd been a gambler. But my mother was dead and he'd raised me on his own from scratch and he had definite ideas as to how my days ought to be spent. "There's plenty of mechanics," he'd say. "You've got to use your head about what you're going to be when you grow up. And how you're going to spend your time."

Wolf had a knack for fixing things, either alone or with his friends. His back yard was like a dustbowl, littered with generators, radiators, exhaust pipes and so many other parts the ground was drenched in oil like it was seeping up from below. Different than our yard, which was a green as the outfield at Wrigley Field, along with the pretty, well-tended garden by the fence.

Father bought me a computer and set it up; all the kids at school and had them and he didn't want me to get behind. "The future is now," he said. "The world is a high tech place."

I ignored the thing. In the basement, I'd discovered my grandfather's old tools, a perfectly intact set of Craftsman wrenches and everything else you'd need, and I began to polish them, like they were made of sterling silver. They ended up on an old pegboard in the garage, carefully arranged the way other kinds displayed model cars or posters of rock stars.

I'd go up and down alleys, finding old lawnmowers or bikes,

then drag them to our garage so I could fix them up. I learned how they worked from books, but when I got stuck; I'd sneak over and talk to Bud Wolfe.

Most likely he'd be covered in grease, ratchet wrench clicking, tools all over the floor. Finally he'd poke his head up and look at me.

"I want to ask you something."

"Shoot," he'd say, wiping his hands on a rag and picking up a can of beer.

"I took the top off this motor and the valves don't move. When you spin the crank, they don't pop up and down like they should."

He'd usually laugh. I never figured out why he thought a mechanical malfunction was so funny, but he'd howl like it was the most comical thing on earth. Then he'd tell me what was the matter and how I could put it right.

"Now get the hell out of here," he'd snap, "and get that damn thing runnin'."

As near as I had it figured, there were things that were true about Bud Wolfe.

One was that most of the things he did that people didn't like happened when he was drunk. He'd walk down the sidewalk talking loud, drinking from a quart bottle like it was milk. He'd have all night parties until the police came. He'd stumble into church bingo games and swear in front of kids and women. Once, when a neighbor honked at him to move one of his cars, he'd open the neighbor's hood, then ripped the horn wires out and threw them at the astonished guy's windshield like a football.

The other fact was that there was always someone who had something nice to say about him. He'd changed a flat for an old lady. He'd helped a neighbor pull out a broken fence. He'd hit fly balls to the kids in the school lot so they could get ready for a big game.

But despite his good side, he wasn't the kind of man my dad ever wanted me to be around.

When I was in sixth grade, I got to know my father better

cook us supper, leaving as the Angelus bells rang from the church tower about the time he came home from work. My mom had been a dancer in Las Vegas. I'd never known her. Dad never kept any photos of her around, but I'd found some in a storage box in the basement. She was in a long row of other women, kicking up their legs, and I knew which one she was because there was a red circle spun around her and it matched some other shots of a woman in the cartoon. On the back of the photo were the words, "To my darling, Phil, Love Always, Brenda." Dad was Phil. And that year my math grades started to take a dive.

"When I was your age," he said one night after supper, "I didn't do well in school either."

"Really?"

"I led a pretty wild life after that, too."

"But you went to college."

"After I lost everything I ever had."

"Even Mom?" I asked quietly.

He tried to take the question in stride, but I could see his eyes tighten and his facial muscles pull taught. "Maybe you're old enough to hear it now," he said at last.

I waited, wondering what he would say.

"A real gambler has it in his guts," he said. "It's not just a few weekends in Atlantic City. You'd put up your paycheck on how far a worm could crawl on a hot sidewalk. We were in Montana and I got in a game of stud with some Indians. I ended up laying the car down on three Jacks. I lost. Then your mother thought we could get away without giving them the car. We hit an ice slick on U.S. 2, just outside Shelby. I never got a scratch. She was dead on arrival." His eyes drifted away. "You weren't even a year old," he said in a voice I could barely hear.

"Was I in the car?" I asked.

"No," he said. "We'd left you back home with my sister."

A flock of birds landed in a tree outside the window. They were loud when they came in, but once in the tree there was a cutting silence.

"It wasn't anyone's fault," he said. "It was the way we were living. All that was left was to try and forget."

"Did you miss her?"

"I still do. But you have to learn. I learned two things. Not many guys can live that way. And I wasn't one of them."

To me, my mother was something foggy and unknown. "Why don't you get married again?" I asked. "We could have another mom."

"You think I'm old," he suddenly smiled, seeming to cheer up. "But one of these days, I just might surprise you."

"I don't like school, though."

"It's important to get a good start in life. The early years mean a lot. Like with a guy who ends up playing pro ball."

"If I had a mom, she could help me with my homework."

"She's gone. We have to live with that."

"I guess so," I said.

"We're doing okay, if you ask me. And we'll get that math."

"But how can I get something I don't really like?"

He looked at me as if searching for a way to express a complex thought. "There are times," he finally said, "you make yourself do things only because you know they're right."

"I don't get it, Dad."

He patted me on the shoulder. "There's other things in life besides fun. Let's put it that way. And I'll be here to help you out."

I thought of his stamp collections, his coin books, the garden. Then Bud Wolfe, a good foot taller, his torn red-flanneled shirt open, his forearms thick as chunks of wood, a naked woman perched on a dolphin, tattooed near his wrist. That man, I thought, probably had all the fun in the world.

But it was a good winter. Dad told me about his business, the way he had to balance accounts, keep inventory, hire people, sometimes fire them; but mostly worry, the way the strongest impression I was left with in the end. And something else, something I didn't piece together until a long time later. It was that somehow I felt his life had drifted away, like a twig in a stream, and there wasn't very much he could do about it.

The thing with Wolfe happened the next spring. That winter I'd managed to do a lot more reading about gasoline engines and I understood more about rods and cams and pistons and how they produced power. It all seemed a thing of perfection to me, impossible to ever fully understand, and ingenious series of combinations working together like the planets and the rotation of the earth and the movement of the stars. And knowing more gave me less need for help—but one day I got stuck again and walked down the alley to his garage. I hadn't seen him at all since the autumn before.

He was there, of course, working on a car, like he'd never moved an inch over the whole winter. "Hi," I said.

He looked over his shoulder, then back to the bolt he was turning. There was an open bottle of whiskey on the fender.

"What's up?" he asked, seemingly annoyed.

"I haven't seen you."

"I've been here," he said. His eyes were bloodshot and I guessed he wasn't on his first drink.

"I need to ask you something," I said, stepping up to the car.

"Don't spill my sauce!" he barked.

"I'm doing a job," I answered. "For a neighbor."

"Regular mechanic, hah?"

I had a feeling I should get out of there; he was in a bad mood and almost slurring his words. But I needed an answer.

"I can't get any spark out of this lawn mower engine."

"Plug okay?"

"I put in a new one."

"Points okay? Opening up?"

"Yeah."

"The thick wire? Is it loose?"

"It tightened it. Changed the condenser, too."

He thought a minute, looked at the floor, then back to me.

"Take a piece of sandpaper," he said. "Rub down the little magnets on the flywheel. Then sand off the bottom of the magneto. She'll spark like a bandit."

"Thanks."

No answer. There hadn't been the usual laugh along with the diagnosis, either.

I turned to go, but suddenly he called after me. "Wait a minute," he said.

I stopped.

"What's in your back pocket?"

"What?"

"In your back pocket," he said, stepping towards me.

I reached down and pulled out my pliers, still there from when I'd left my garage.

"Give me that thing!" he said, ripping it from my hand.

"It's mine," I said, weakly.

"Don't give me that shit!"

Then there was a scraping noise as the side door of the garage dragged open and one of his friends stopped in. He was in jeans and a dirty t-shirt, hauling a case of beer. "What's all the yelling about?" he asked.

I spun and ran out the garage, hearing only the wind rushing past me and the sound of their angry voices calling me back.

When I got to my house and walked through the yard, Dad was in the garage turning the ground over with a long-handled hoe. "Hi," he said.

I mumbled something and kept walking.

He stood up straight, leaning on the wooden shaft of the tool. "What's the matter?" he asked.

I stopped. "Nothing."

He bent down and plowed through the dirt a few more times, then glanced over at me again. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

"Bud Wolfe took my pliers," I said quietly.

"What are you doing around him?"

"I was stuck on an engine. So I went to ask."

He didn't answer.

"Who else could I turn to?"

He dropped the hoe on the ground and his face went red.

"It's my pliers," I said.

I turned and walked stiffly away into the garage. Once inside, I went to Dad's car and sat behind the wheel. I thought about the photographs of my mother in the basement, buried in a box just like she was buried somewhere in the ground. He'd never taken me to the grave because he it would have been like if instead of going in the house to brood alone, he would have had a woman there to talk things over with.

A nudge woke me up. I saw my father. He reached into the car and I mechanically stuck out my hand and took his. I didn't say anything as he pulled me out of the garage and we headed down the alley.

We walked in silence. I should have felt pride, maybe elation: my dad was going to stand up to Bud Wolfe. But any sense of joy quickly faded when I looked at him. His face was pale and his lips were laced tightly together. He never looked worse. Yet we kept plodding on, slowly, as if heading towards some place where there could only be pain. And then I was afraid.

"Maybe he was right," I said. "Maybe I took his pliers by mistake."

"Is that what happened?"

"No," I said, my voice a whisper.

"Okay. Then your old man's going to get it back."

I'd never heard him say 'old man' before and it sounded odd and out of place. When I glanced at his face again, it looked hard set and almost angry. Then we were in front of Wolfe's garage.

Wolfe looked up.

"You've got my boy's pliers," Dad said.

"Will you look at this," Wolfe's friend called out.

"He was by my tool box," Wolfe said.

"My boy doesn't steal."

"Tell 'em Eddie," Wolfe said to his friend.

"I'm too scared," Eddie came back, smiling, holding a beer. They both laughed.

"He didn't take it," my dad said. "I want it back."

"You got your name on it?" asked Eddie.

"It belongs to my son," Dad said again.

Everyone was silent. Wolfe stepped right up to Dad and stood there, dwarfing him. Dad seemed small and frail by comparison, yet somehow confident in his own way. It seemed like a lot of time was going by.

Wolfe turned and glanced at me, a little more time passed.

"You got a lot of nerve," Wolfe said to my dad, "for a guy your size."

"I'm pretty sure you won't take this all the way," Dad answered.

"Are you sure now? And just how do you know?"

"Experience," Dad said.

Wolfe stared at him for a few more seconds, as if thinking it all over. He looked at me again. Then he turned around and stepped towards the toolbox. "Hey," he said, stooping down and picking up the pliers.

He stepped forward and placed them in my father's hand.

"Mine was right next to the grips after all, he said. "How about that? My mistake."

Dad took the pliers, glanced at him, then grabbed my hand and pulled me out into the alley. We heard rough laughter as we walked away.

That night at supper, Dad didn't say very much. In a sense I knew what he'd done was courageous, but it still didn't seem all that brave and it hadn't left me in a very good mood. By the way Dad jabbed at his potatoes with his fork, it appeared like he wasn't in a good mood either.

"You got them back," I said, trying to lighten things up.

"Yes, I did."

"And you didn't even seem scared."

He laced his fork on his plate and glanced towards the stove.

"Were you scared?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

"Yes it does," I came back.

"All that matters is the result."

"Yeah. You got back the pliers."

"That's not what was at stake."

I didn't answer.

"Did you understand that?"

"No."

He looked at me then, an examining stare. I seemed as though what he was about to say was very important to him and he wanted to make sure he was going to get it right. "Bud Wolfe," he said slowly, "is not a totally bad man. And I knew he wouldn't fight over a pair of pliers. He knew it and I knew it." He paused and folded his hands together tightly. "The whole thing was about respect. Simply respect."

"But he does respect you. That's why he gave you the pliers."

He looked down, then back up. "You don't quite get it," he said. "It was your respect we were after."

I answered right away. "I do respect you, Dad. I always have."

Outside the Angelus Bells faded away. Dad stared out the window towards the sound and right then it almost seemed like a gentle woman's voice. Then he started to eat again and so I did I. All of a sudden I felt better, but it wasn't because of the pliers or Bud Wolfe or even what Dad had done. It was just that he seemed at peace for once and I had a feeling that everything was going to be okay.

Bud Wolfe moved about a year later, after stopped by the neighbor's houses, one by one, offering beer, saying goodbye. My dad took his beer and they drank together for a few minutes and then Wolfe winked at me. My dad smiled. They shook hands

"I heard you used to play cards," Wolfe said.

"That's right."

"In Vegas."

"Right again."

"Did you win a lot?"

"Not enough, in the end."

"You got a nice a kid there."

"I know."

Wolfe started to step away. "I bet you were better than you let on," he called back. "What was your game?"

"Blackjack," my dad said.

"You know the game real good," Wolfe said. Then he was on to the next house, to leave amends, no doubt, for God knows what.

Paul P. Wolf

Think Of

Think of an open field, freshly cut
and green as indigo blue;
think of wind across an amber creek
where the catfish never bite and
the turtles rise like stepping stones;
think of bare feet, Levi jeans, dirt roads,
and cars red as wet cherries;
think of hugs and back-seat scores,
football jackets, and beer cans pitched
at the worthless moon;
think of Aunt Sara and Uncle John
who scolded you and molded you
and made you who you're not.

think of a time long ago, easy as July honey,
before the telephone calls and Fax replies,
and where it was you meant to be
and all those things you didn't do,

then ask yourself –
what happened?

Robert Carlton

Dialogue

Hour after hour Mitchel Chatelain stared into the darkness of his eyelids, feeling stranded in a black abyss of suspended animation. He lay in his intensive care unit bed, wishing he would wake up from this nightmare, but knowing he couldn't.

Two days ago, or so it seemed, all sense of time began to escape him, he felt as if he was coming down with a severe case of the flu. Within hours those seemingly harmless symptoms had given way to paralysis. Doctors took a day to arrive at a diagnosis, Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare disease of unknown cause that attacks the nervous system.

They told him he was lucky. Guillain-Barré had a relatively low mortality rate. His prognosis for a full recovery was good in spite of the severe symptoms, but it would take months for the effects of the disorder to be fully reversed. Mitchel's only remaining voluntary motor response was his ability to wiggle his big toes, ever so slowly and ever so slightly. For the time being, his perfectly sound mind was the prisoner of his lame, twenty-seven-year-old body. While he didn't feel sorry for himself, Mitchel certainly didn't feel lucky.

As Mitchel waited for the three precious fragments of the day when the hospital permitted family to see him, he listened endlessly to the cyclical opening and closing of air valves as the respirator next to his bed pumped artificial breaths through his trachea tube. An occasional hospital page and the ICU staff's rounds offered the only other distractions to the boredom that engulfed him.

Mitchel heard footsteps at the doorway to the right of the foot of the bed.

"Knock, knock. Hey, Mitch, it's me. Don't bother getting up, I'll let myself in."

Clark, you wise-ass. *I never thought I'd be so glad to hear your obnoxious voice.* In spite of his own condition, Mitchel had-

n't expected his younger brother to visit so soon. A fifteen hundred mile trip so close to exams wasn't practical. Some of Mitchel's involuntary responses remained. He felt his throat choking up.

"Oh, don't you look great, but I really think you need a few more gadgets plugged into you."

Mitchel was glad his own situation had not affected Clark's sense of humor. After listening to the sterile hospital vernacular for the past 36 hours, he found Clark's sarcasm and irreverence refreshing.

"Hey, the nurse said you could see if I gave you a little help. She said it might work better if I lift one eyelid at a time."

Suddenly Mitchel's dark world was away in a wave of light. Looking through the pool of instant illumination, Mitchel slowly focused on the features of his brother's face.

"It kind of sucks to think that you wait all day to see a few seconds of something, and it turns out to be my ugly grill," said Clark, wearing his charming grin.

It'll do, brother. Believe me, it'll do.

Clark lowered Mitchel's eyelid after a few seconds.

"Ma's been doing lots of reading about this nasty crap you got. Seems Andy Griffith had the same thing about ten years ago. If Matlock can rebound from it, you can too." Then in typical Clark fashion, he jumped to a different topic, "I suppose this is your lunch hanging in the plastic bag. It can't be much worse than the junk they served on the plane this morning."

For the next fifteen minutes Clark update Mitchel on college life in California. Mitchel couldn't recall the last time he had taken the time to listen to his younger brother. As far back as their pre-teen years, Clark's issues had always seemed too trivial to concern Mitchel. But today, Mitchel devoured every word Clark offered.

Mitchel tried to pass time by playing memory games. He compiled mental lists of everything he could think of — books he had read, movies he had seen, cities he had visited, addresses, phone numbers, World Series pairings, even the names of former

classmates. On other occasions he filled his days by mentally traversing the three miles he had jogged every day for the past two years. He completed the first run in record time, less than sixty seconds. As he concentrated and tried to recall every minute detail along the path, Mitchel was able to stretch each successive trip so that the sixth one lasted at least half the time that a real jog would have lasted.

Periodically the effects of his affliction interrupted Mitchel's mind games. After Clark left, Mitchel detected phlegm collecting in his airway. At first he was distracted by it, but soon enough had accumulated so that it rattled with each breath. Eventually the effects were severe enough that Mitchel was alarmed for fear of suffocation. Just before he reached a panic stage, an unexpected visitor stopped by.

"Mr. Chatelain. Are you awake? I'm Vicki Trammel with respiratory care. I'm here to check your ventilator and give you some breathing treatments."

Mitchel wiggled his toes to let her know that he was conscious. He had discovered earlier that this signal wasn't always effective because staff members who were unfamiliar with his condition would inadvertently cover his feet with the bed sheet.

"OK. You are awake. Great"

She walked to the right side of the bed, between Mitchel and the respirator.

"Sounds like you've got some fluid in there. That's normal, but I don't suppose any of this seems to normal to you."

Wiggle

"In a few seconds I am going to disconnect the ventilator from your trachea. Then I'll slide a suction hose down in there to remove the mucus that's interfering with your breathing. There's one catch. You won't be getting any assistance from the ventilator while I'm suctioning you. That's no big deal. I'll be right here the entire time. If you get alarmed, move your toes and I'll reconnect you. OK?"

Wiggle

When Vicki disconnected the respirator, Mitchel felt as if his breath had been sucked out of his body, and his chest was going

to cave in. He had an incredible urge to draw in a breath, but he had no means to make it happen. He was immediately tempted to signal Vicki, but he resisted. Mitchel's being removed from the life support equipment made him realize that the ability to breathe on his own had been his most profound to the wicked disease. Vicki continued to talk to Mitchel in a reassuring voice. She told him what she was doing and why she was doing it. Mitchel handled the procedure well, except the slurping of the fluids through the vacuum hose tickled his gag reflexes.

After Vicki finished the treatment, she stayed and talked to Mitchel for a while. She told him he was the hospital's first *Guillain-Barre* patient in five years. Many of the people caring for him had never heard of the disease before. Mitchel now understood why staff frequently came into his room, went about their business, and left without ever uttering a word to him. Apparently these people weren't always aware that a fully conscious mind resided inside the dormant shell they saw.

Vicki added that she had recently worked with a *Guillain-Barre* patient at another hospital, and she described in detail what Mitchel should expect as he made his slow recovery. She also provided Mitchel with a visual description of the hospital room and staff. As she spoke, Mitchel processed her descriptions into images so a picture of his surroundings developed with a Polaroid-like effect in his mind. The one image that was missing was hers. Mitchel couldn't help but wonder what physical attributes accompanied this individual he found to be so warm, charming and intriguing. She was the only person who seemed able to bridge the dark and still world into which he had stumbled with the vibrant world he formerly inhabited.

Mitchel was a mile into one of his matinee runs when he heard an alarming page.

"Dr. Burnside to ICU please. Dr. Burnside, ICU."

Because his mother had been a nurse for twenty years, Mitchel recognized the page as a coded message to hospital employees that a potential fire situation existed in the ICU. Footsteps immediately filled the hallway outside his door. He

heard his door shut, and the footsteps were no longer audible.

Fear gripped Mitchel. He imagined the worst.

Suppose there is a fire. Who would they rescue first - the ambulatory patients? It isn't like a fireman or an orderly could just wisk me out of here even if they could carry my one hundred seventy-pound frame over their shoulders. They would have to deal with the respirator. I'll bet it's not small. I wonder if it has a portable battery pack.

Mitchel was relieved that he didn't smell any smoke. He then realized for the first time he hadn't smelled anything since he had been admitted. He couldn't discern any taste in his mouth either. The damn disease had taken those senses as well! *When is it going to stop stealing from me?*

After five minutes of frustrating and agonizing silence, Mitchel's anxiety was put to rest when he heard the intercom voice announce, "Clear Dr. Burnside."

Mitchel woke up. At least he thought he had fallen asleep. He wasn't always certain. He cleared his mind, trying to orient himself. He wondered how long he had been asleep and what part of the day was it? Not only couldn't he look at his watch, but his body's own clock, his stomach, had been bypassed with the IV feedings.

He detected a familiar sensation about his nose, an itch. An itch that he couldn't scratch. He tried to distract himself by diving into one of his cerebral activities. That tactic didn't work. The sensation became more intense, the urge stronger, and the futility almost unbearable. *Why is this disease so cruel? It's stripped me of so much, yet this itch, of all things, has escaped its affects.*

Mitchel heard a knock at his door.

"Mitchel, how are you doing?"

Mitchel recognized his sister's voice. *Please Joanne, stop with the questions that you know I can't answer.* She had asked him at least a dozen questions during her first visit, and their inability to communicate had driven her to tears.

"I understand Clark came by for a visit already."

The itch. Mitchel wiggled both toes.

"Are you trying to tell me something? What is it?"

Wiggle left. Wiggle right. Wiggle both simultaneously.

"Just stop for a minute before we both get in a frenzy again. I've got a plan to share with you. When I got home last night, I told Jack and the boys about our visit. By the way, they send their love, and they'll be up here to see you Sunday."

Mitchel and his brother-in-law didn't share a particularly close relationship. If Jack is willing to surrender the TV remote and leave the sofa, either I am in worse shape then I thought or they didn't life the blackout for the Saints game.

"Anyway, Preston came up with a great idea. Leave it to my nine-year-old to figure things out. Here's his plan. Move your right toe for yes and left for no. OK?"

Wiggle right.

"Are you uncomfortable?"

Wiggle right.

"Is it below the waist?"

Wiggle left.

"Above the neck?"

Wiggle right.

"Should I move your head?"

Wiggle left.

"It had to do with your head though?"

Wiggle right.

"Mouth?"

Wiggle left.

"Nose?"

Wiggle right.

"What can be uncomfortable about your nose? Do you have to blow it?"

Wiggle left. Wiggle left.

"Don't get that way with me. I'm trying very hard. Is it cold?"

Wiggle left. Wiggle left. Wiggle left.

"Calm down! Let me think." Joanne was silent for a few seconds. "Does it itch?"

Wiggle right. Wiggle right. Wiggle right.

Joanne scratched her brother's nose in an awkward and tentative manner since Mitchel was unable to provide her with any specific directions. Nonetheless, his relief was instantaneous and sensational. After Joanne finished, she further indulged Mitchel by reading poetry from some of his favorite collections until visiting hours were over.

The sudden and unexpected sound of her quiet and unfamiliar voice startled Mitchel. She had entered the room without knocking or making a sound and seemed to be standing only a foot or two from his bed.

"How unfortunate this is, but it's all part of a plan. A plan that has beckoned me." *Who are you?* He found it odd that his visitor didn't introduce herself. While not everyone who came in spoke to Mitchel, those that did always told him who they were and why they were there.

"The spirit of this young man yearns to be released from the shackles of his still body."

Who are you talking about? He suspected she thought he couldn't hear, and she spoke only to herself. *And my spirit's downing just fine, thank you.* Mitchel sensed a chill across the back of his neck.

"Another senseless and despicable example of medical technology being abused. Machines should never maintain life in a body when the mind is no longer there.

Mitchel didn't care for the tone of her soliloquy. *Lady, my mind is right here. See.*

Wiggle right. Wiggle left.

She offered no acknowledgement. *Damn, the sheets must be over my toes again.*

"I have been summoned to free your spirit. I will put an end to this atrocity, just as I have to the others."

Who the hell are you? Where do you get off thinking you have the right to make these decisions? Help me, someone...anyone! Mitchel heard a set of footsteps.

"Ms. Tierney, what are you doing here?"

Mitchel recognized the voice of Stan Guilory, one of the ICU nurses.

"Did you pick up that medicine from the pharmacy yet?"

"I was on my way, Mr. Guilory," replied Tierney as she left the room.

"Mitchel, your feet are covered again. Sorry about that. It's just taking us a little while to get used to your special needs. I understand you and your sister worked out a little sign language. We all hope to enjoy the benefit of that nifty piece of work."

Wiggle left. Wiggle right. Wiggle left. Wiggle right.

"You want to try it out right now?"

Wiggle right.

Before their conversation could get started, Stan was summoned back to the nurses' station.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," Stan told Mitchel as he departed.

How am I going to tell Stan that this crazy is going to kill me? I can't imagine the Twenty Questions thing working.

"Mitchel, are you uncomfortable?"

Wiggle left.

"Well then, is someone trying to kill you?"

Wiggle right.

"Is it Ms. Tierney?"

Wiggle right.

I wish it could be that easy, thought Mitchel. *How can I stop her?*

"Good morning, Mitchel," said Vicki as she entered the room and approached the respirator.

Samantha Tierney looked at the nurses' station before she stepped into Mitchel Chatelain's room. She saw no one. A patient at the other end of the unit had just arrested, and every free hand in ICU had responded. There wouldn't be a better time for her to complete her mission.

She looked down at the young man, and for an instant saw the face of her son, Cooper. *The doctors had no right to put her or Cooper through that agony. Month after month, they had him*

plugged into those machines. They knew his brain was dead, and he would never recover. Still, they insisted on keeping him alive. It was a game for them, a competition. Each one trying to prove him superiority, and keeping Cooper and all those others alive as a means of keeping score.

She walked over to the IV stand and withdrew the syringe from her pocket. She would have to flee the area quickly after the injection. The drugs would stop the young man's heart in less than two minutes. As she was about to insert the needle into the plastic port on the IV tube, someone from behind her yelled something, grabbed her arm, and tried to wrestle the syringe away from her right hand.

Tierney spun quickly around only to be rocked in the face by Vicki's clenched fist. The blow stunned Tierney, but she didn't let go of the deadly instrument. Vicki maintained a firm grip around Tierney's right hand. Tierney pushed Vicki toward the wall at the head of Mitchel's bed. They crashed into the respirator and knocked over the IV stand to the floor. Their collision jarred the air hose loose from Mitchel's trachea tube, and an audible alarm resonated through the room. Tierney pressed her left elbow to Vicki's throat. Tierney, the stronger of the two, slowly gained control of the struggle so that the point of the needle was just below Vicki's left ear, and a half-inch away from her neck. In an effort to gain the final bit of leverage she needed, Tierney adjusted her footing. In doing so, she stepped in a puddle of IV fluid, lost her traction and slipped to the floor. Vicki fell on top of her. In the fall, the syringe slipped from Tierney's grasp, skittered across the floor, and came to rest at the feet of Stan Guilory and a hospital security guard who had rushed into the room.

Vicki scrambled to her feet and over to Mitchel.

Mitchel had heard Vicki yell "Stop" and the scuffle began. An instant later he realized his lifeline had ceased to function. Mitchel didn't even notice the alarm. He was too focused on the fact that he wasn't breathing. While the fracas lasted less than twenty seconds, it seemed like minutes to Mitchel. He was certain Tierney and Vicki were the combatants. He knew his life

Vicki's voice at his side.

"This woman tried to kill my patient."

Almost simultaneously, Mitchel detected the sensations of the respirator filling his lungs with fresh breaths.

"It's all right, Mitchel. Security has her in custody, and Stan's here with us."

Vicki took a moment to silence the respirator alarm and to confirm that the unit was fully functional.

"Vicki, you didn't give me a chance to ask earlier, but how did you know what was going down with Tierney?" asked Stan.

"Mitchel told me. Actually, he spelled it out for me."

"How did he do that? I thought all he could do was the yes-no thing with his toes."

"That was enough, as long as I asked the right questions."

"Such as?"

"Asking if the word he was attempting to convey began with a vowel. If he wiggled right, I slowly recited the vowels. He wiggled right again when I got to the letter. If it was a consonant, I asked if it was in the first half of the alphabet. Depending on how he answered, I slowly recited the consonants until he wiggled again."

"Amazing. Absolutely amazing." Said Stan.

"I guess we'd have to agree. Right, Mitchel?"

Wiggle right.

You're certainly right if you were talking about Vicki.

"No man, I didn't see any rings on her fingers," said Clark. "But, you've got to stop thinking about that respiratory chick. If you get out of line with her, she'll kick your ass just like did to that aide two days ago."

Clark stopped by for a final visit before returning to school, and Mitchel had asked him a few questions about Vicki. "Unless the girl has a toe fetish or something, I'd say you're out of luck. Have you forgotten you're fresh out of moves right now, so to speak?"

Wiggle left.
"No? Well, Prince Charming, how do you expect to impress the princess?"

"Good morning, Chatelains." Vicki came into the room.

Wiggle right. Wiggle left.

"What's on your mind this morning?" asked Vicki. "Does it start with a vowel?"

Wiggle right.

"A-E."

Wiggle right.

"Second letter. Vowel?"

Wiggle right

"A-E-I-O-U." Vicki paused. "I'm out of vowels, Mitchel.

Wait. Y?"

Wiggle right.

"Third letter. Consonant?"

Wiggle left.

"Uh. A-E."

Wiggle right.

"E-Y-E. Eye."

Mitchel paused for a count of two, then slowly opened both eyes just as he had been able to do all morning. He found himself staring at Vicki's face. While she was attractive, Mitchel might not have given her a second look if he had passed her in an airport or a mall, under normal circumstances. But, these weren't normal circumstances, and Mitchel found himself mesmerized by her beauty. It perfectly complemented the person who had befriended him and whom he had come to appreciate over the past few days. Vicki stared back in surprise. Then, reaching down deep within himself and focusing all of his concentration on a singular purpose, Mitchel winked his left eye.

"Nice move, Prince Charming," laughing Clark.

Kelly Geohegan



The *Lowell Pearl* is a product of the Literary Society at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Questions regarding the group may be phoned in at (978) 934-5084. Once again, we remind our readers that this is our final issue, and we thank you for your support.

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